

Hernandez family crosses cultural lines to be named Hispanic Family of the Year

Vickie and Ishmael Hernandez have worked tirelessly to provide a stable and nurturing home environment to some 25 foster children over the course of 15 years. The family has also adopted four children from Hispanic backgrounds. It is safe to say that the Hernandezes have positively touched the lives of children in their care, but it is apparent that they have let the children touch theirs as well. For Vickie, who is not Hispanic, that included an investment in time and energy to cross cultural boundaries in the name of love.

"I believe it is important for my children to maintain their cultural identity. I learned to cook traditional Mexican dishes and I am learning to speak Spanish," she said.

Family lines are also a bit blurred in the Hernandez household. The parents have made an effort to maintain relationships with the siblings of their adopted children, whom they fostered but were not able to adopt. Those connections are valuable to the children at home and to those who now live elsewhere.

Although fostering and parenting is in itself a full-time job, the Hernandezes still find time to work outside the home without missing a beat. Ishmael works at a nursing home and Vickie currently is a bus driver. They found that in some cases, work influenced their family life, and at

Vickie and Ishmael Hernandez were named the 2005 Hispanic Family of the Year at the DCFS Hispanic Conference. "Merely thanking them does not cover the depth of gratitude owed to them...Acknowledging and recognizing that to open up their hearts and welcome into their lives the wounded spirits of children, and all that comes with them, is a courageous and honorable task."

– Hispanic Advisory Committee

the same time their family life had an impact on work. Back in 1999, when Vickie worked for Motorola, the company honored her with its highest award because of her work with children as a foster parent. Due to her efforts, Motorola donated money to the DCFS Elgin Field Office in Vickie's name to decorate and buy toys for the visitation/playrooms.



Vickie and Ishmael Hernandez and their children Damien, Christian and Jasmine

Vickie remains active in supporting efforts to benefit other families and children. She is still an integral part of planning of the annual foster children's holiday party, willing to solicit donations of presents and food. Vickie and Ishmael are known to show up at the holiday parties with 100 hot dogs for the children to eat.

The accomplishment that has them beaming these days has been to watch their oldest son transition to independence. They have a great sense of pride in knowing they built a firm foundation for him within their family. That love and a passion for nurturing will not be lost even as he marches to adulthood. Besides, they are hoping to adopt at least one more child.

Youth board tackles tough issues

In Illinois, termination of parental rights and a subsequent adoption means that sibling relationships are also legally dissolved. In many cases, adoptive families work at maintaining those connections between siblings in different families. However, there is no legal requirement. Relationships can become complicated or even ill-advised, leading to possible disruptions and/or disappointment.

The Northern Region Youth Advisory Board (YAB) is taking a close look at this situation. In conjunction with the statewide board, youth are developing state legislation to establish a legal means for maintaining sibling relationships after an adoption.

Northern Region YAB President Jeremy Harvey sees this as an opportunity for young people to self-advocate. The issue has already found sponsorship in the Illinois House, and the Governor assigned a workgroup of youth, parents and experts in the field.

This is just one of the important issues the YAB is actively working on. New members are always welcome. The Northern Region Foster Parent Advisory Council and Youth Advisory board meet on the same time on the second Thursday of each month from 6 p.m. - 8:30 p.m. at the Aurora Regional Office, 8 East Galena Blvd on the 3rd floor. Dinner and soft drinks are provided.

Northern Region celebrates 13 new adoptive families during national celebration

National Adoption Month in November hit with a bang in Rockford. On Saturday, November 19, Winnebago County judges joined forces in a special celebration marking the second annual Adoption Day. Court personnel opened the courthouse on the weekend to complete adoptions on a day celebrated across the country.

Chief Judge Zenoff, Judge Patrick Heaslip and Judge Brian Shore volunteered their time to finalize adoptions of 21 children to 13 families. Not only did the judges offer up a Saturday morning, they were joined by staff from Catholic Charities of Rockford, Children's Home and Aid Society of Rockford, Lutheran Social Services of Rockford and DCFS adoption workers, who were on hand to implement the whole process, and to help celebrate the new adoptions.

"It's a big change," Mindy Harrison said moments after her family officially grew from one birth child to five. "But there's no way I could go back to our lives without them."



Illinois Celebrates ADOPTION

The children's ages are 17, 14, 13, and 12. Stevie and Kenneth joined Jeff and Mindy Harrison as foster children in 2004. Amanda and Kinsey are Mindy's nieces, who began living with them at the beginning of 2005. Baby Lily was on hand Saturday for the court proceedings, taking it all in with the bright eyes of a six-month-old.

The Winnebago County Court House pulled out all the stops to make the day festive and memorable. The fourth floor was overflowing with balloons, flowers and treats to celebrate with the new families.



Help a Child

Illinois Child Abuse Prevention Fund

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\$ _____

DCFS investigator receives honor from Lake County Child Advocacy Center



Coryn
Turner

A DCFS supervisor was recently honored for her compassion and devoted service to victims of child abuse and neglect. The Lake County

Child Advocacy Center presented the award to child protection supervisor Coryn Turner during a December 6 ceremony held in Gurnee.

The annual award is given to DCFS staff who have demonstrated cooperation and commitment to the Lake County Child Advocacy Center and the people it serves.

“Coryn has such a warm spirit, and she always goes above what her job description requires so that we can serve children who have been victimized,” said Sandra Bankston, a Child Advocacy Center caseworker.

Turner, a 20-year veteran in child welfare services, began her DCFS career in 1992 as a follow-up worker. She currently supervises six child protection staff at the Waukegan field office. “This award has motivated me again to stay focused and remain in child welfare,” said Turner, noting that child welfare workers often do not receive recognition for the vital work they perform. She added that the Lake County Child Advocacy Center plays an

important role by offering multi-disciplinary services to child victims during the early stages of an investigation.

The Waukegan-based Advocacy Center was established in 1985 as a cooperative effort between DCFS, local law enforcement agencies, and the Lake County State’s Attorney. The entities work together to deftly handle reports of child abuse in a child-focused manner that supports families. It is among the oldest of 36 child advocacy centers currently serving 80 counties in Illinois.

Northern News

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Anyone can call the regional reporter with foster parent association news and schedules; local training notices; features on foster families and community members working for children; photos; and ideas for news articles or supportive services that would be helpful for caregivers to know.

DCFS Contact Information

Chicago Headquarters

100 West Randolph Street
6-200
Chicago IL 60601
312-814-6800
TTD 312-814-8783

Springfield Headquarters

406 East Monroe Street
Springfield IL 62701-1498
217-785-2509
TTD 217-785-6605

Child Abuse Hotline

800-25-ABUSE

Missing Child Helpline

866-503-0184

Advocacy Office

800-232-3798

Day Care Information

877-746-0829

Foster Parent Hotline

800-624-KIDS

Inspector General

800-722-9124

Youth Hotline

800-232-3798

Northern Region Training Calendar

Integrated Assessment Training

College of DuPage Area 630-942-2903

ELGIN
Feb. 28 (Tue)

Judson College
7-9 p.m.

ROCKFORD
March 2 (Tue)

Rock Valley College
6:30-8:30 p.m.

LOCKPORT SOS Children's Village
March 14 (Tue) 9:30-11:30 a.m.

WAUKEGAN Ramada Inn
March 16 (Thu) 7-9 p.m.

Rock Valley Area 815-921-2010

Educational Advocacy

Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hrs.

It is mandatory for one foster parent in each family to attend Educational Advocacy Training in order to be re-licensed. Educational Advocacy Training is offered following each Foster PRIDE/Adopt PRIDE training and many additional times. This six-hour course covers information foster parents need to know so that they can advocate for their foster children's educational rights and needs.

Non-PRIDE Inservice Training

College of DuPage Area 630-942-2903

There are no trainings scheduled through the College of DuPage at this time.

Rock Valley Area 815-921-2015

School Discipline and Behavior Plans

ROCKFORD
March 30 (Sat)

DCFS Office
6:30-9 p.m.

College of DuPage Area 630-942-2903

AURORA
March 11 (Sat)

Comfort Suites
9 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

GLEN ELLYN
March 18 (Sat)

College of DuPage
9 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

ROMEOVILLE
March 18 (Sat)

Comfort Inn
9 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

Rock Valley Area 815-921-2010

FREEPORT
March 4 (Sat)

Catholic Charities
9 a.m.-4 p.m.

The DCFS Lending Library is a resource to allow foster and adoptive parents access to a multitude of books, audio cassettes and videos for self-directed training in parenting and family life. The materials span 17 categories. Licensed foster and adoptive parents can borrow materials for a two-week period at no charge. The order form is available in the 3rd Edition of the Lending Library Catalog, which can be viewed on the DCFS web site at www.state.il.us/dcfs.

For more information call:
College of DuPage Area ~ 630-942-2903
Rock Valley Area ~ 815-921-2015

